



# Big Morongo Canyon Preserve TRAIL SYSTEM



Bureau of Land Management



Note: Canyon Trail is 8.34 Miles Round Trip.  
Moderate-Strenuous, See Trail Notes and Inset

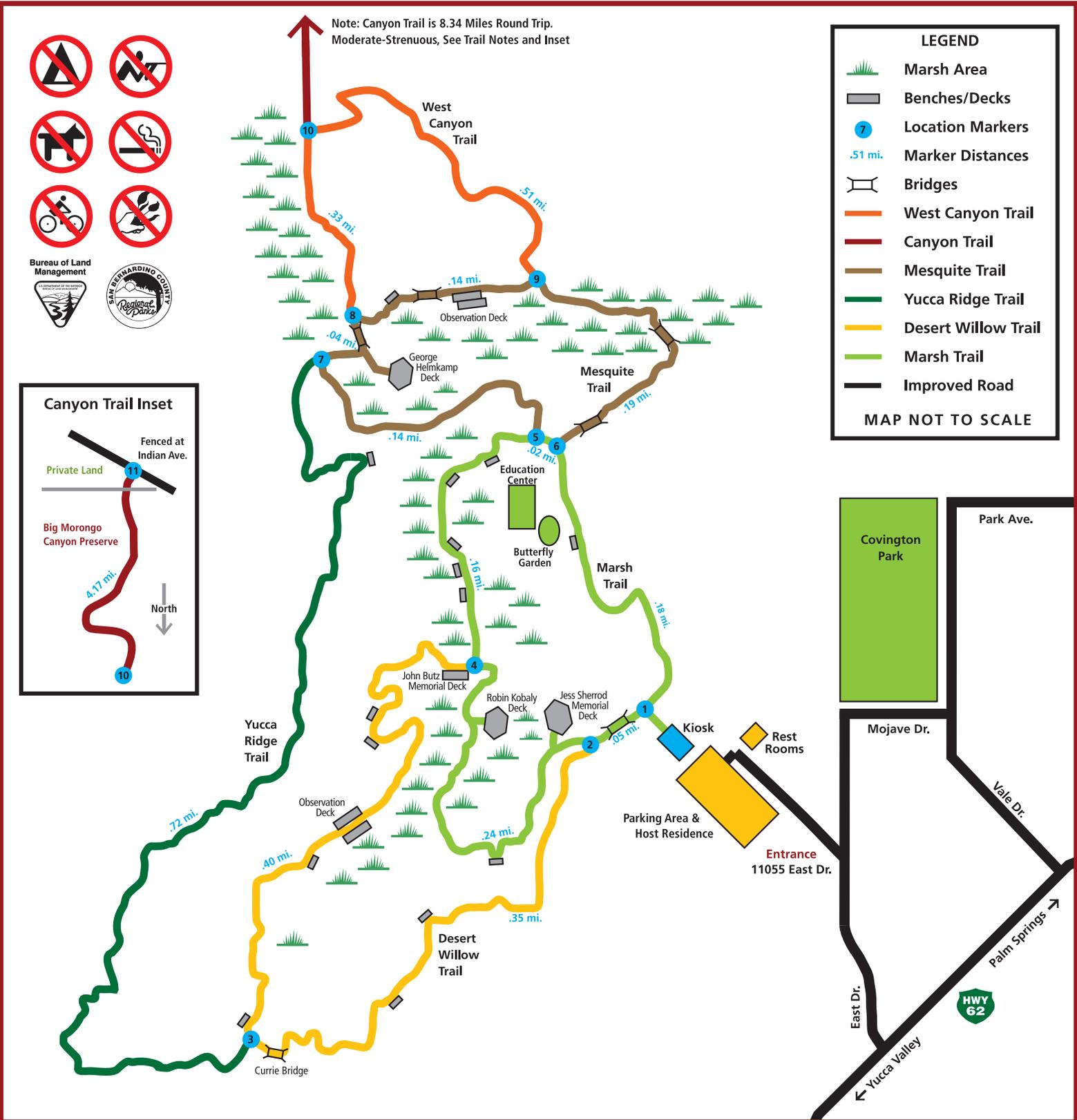
**LEGEND**

- Marsh Area
- Benches/Decks
- Location Markers
- Marker Distances
- Bridges
- West Canyon Trail
- Canyon Trail
- Mesquite Trail
- Yucca Ridge Trail
- Desert Willow Trail
- Marsh Trail
- Improved Road

MAP NOT TO SCALE

**Canyon Trail Inset**

Fenced at Indian Ave.  
Private Land  
Big Morongo Canyon Preserve  
North



Big Morongo Canyon Preserve • PO Box 780 • Morongo Valley, CA 92256  
 (760) 363-7190 • [www.bigmorongo.org](http://www.bigmorongo.org) • Open: 7:30 am to sunset year round  
 Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve is a nonprofit organization supported entirely by donations and volunteers.

# Big Morongo Canyon Preserve

## Trail Guide

TRAIL	LENGTH	TIME	DIFFICULTY
Marsh Trail*	0.65 miles 1046 meters	15 minutes	Easy
Desert Willow Trail	0.75 miles 1207 meters	25 minutes	Easy - Moderate
Yucca Ridge Trail	0.72 miles 1159 meters	25 minutes	Easy
Mesquite Trail	0.51 miles 821 meters	15 minutes	Easy
West Canyon Trail	0.84 miles 1658 meters	35 minutes	Moderate - Difficult
Canyon Trail	8.34 miles (round trip) 13.42 kilometers 9.76 miles from parking lot	5 hours	Moderate - Strenuous

\*Brochure for Marsh Trail self-guided tour available at the Kiosk

## Trail Descriptions

### Marsh Trail

This cool winding boardwalk meanders over and along the stream under a canopy of Fremont cottonwoods, red willows and an occasional white alder. Marshes along the way support dwarf willow, goldenrods, cattail, yerba mansa, water parsnip and water cress. A birder's paradise, especially during the spring and fall migration of neotropical birds, the marsh area supports the second highest density of breeding birds known in the United States.

Annual surveys document that 1400 pairs of breeding birds per square kilometer nest here. Extend your experience by relaxing at one of the three decks, located along the way. This 6 foot wide boardwalk with edge curbs is made of 60% recycled plastic milk containers and 40% sawdust. Environmentally appropriate, the building material lasts longer than wood and is nonpolluting. This trail is handicapped accessible and provides a nature experience for everyone.

### Desert Willow Trail

Take a nice sunny walk with limited shade along most of the trail. Midday walks during the summer months can be quite hot, but there are benches situated in shady spots along the way. This dirt trail wanders through open fields of fall-blooming alkali goldenbush, along the edge of honey mesquite thickets, then drops into a desert wash habitat with desert willow, evergreen yerba santa and wild tarragon. Just passed the Currie Bridge, continue your walk along the Desert Willow Trail where it joins the shady Marsh Trail, or climb the Yucca Ridge Trail to get panoramic views of the valley, the canyon and the mountains.

## Yucca Ridge Trail

Experience a spectacular bird's-eye view of the preserve's woodland and wetland areas. Take in the Morongo Valley, the snowcapped San Gorgonio and San Jacinto mountain peaks, and the Big Morongo Canyon below. Walk through the vegetation of the desert scrub, including creosote bush, Mojave yucca, Mormon tea, numerous species of cacti and even club moss clinging to the cool sides of the rock surfaces. View white dikes of aplite intruding into an ancient outcrop of gneiss that is over one billion years old and one of the oldest exposed rock formations in California. This trail enters the marsh habitat at the juncture with the Mesquite Trail at one end and joins the desert wash habitat along the Desert Willow Trail at the other.

## Mesquite Trail

Enjoy an enchanting streamside walk under the canopy of Fremont cottonwoods and red willows. Boardwalks and bridges lead you along the stream that forms the marsh habitat which supports cattails, bulrushes, wire rushes, water cress and yerba mansa. Travel along the base of the Yucca Ridge and relax on the benches of the large octagon-shaped George Helmkamp Deck. Skirt the foot of a desert mountain where scrub oak, Mojave yucca, cacti, Indian paintbrush and boulders painted with lichen hug the drier slopes above. From the comfort of the deck, observe a large outcropping of ancient gneiss that marks the face of the Morongo Valley Fault.

## West Canyon Trail

The West Canyon trail is a moderately easy climb, with some steep areas. After reaching the top of the saddle ridge, follow the gentle slope to a panoramic view of Big Morongo Canyon, where the stream slowly meanders down the canyon. A couple of steep switchbacks will lead you to the canyon floor and an easy walk up to the marsh. Along the way you will enjoy desert plants as they continue their recovery from the wildfire that ravaged the area in June 2005. Mojave yucca, Mormon tea, creosote bush, wild plum, honey mesquite and desert almond are among the plants that continue their unending struggle to survive. Springtime brings an abundance of wildflowers to the hillsides below the saddle. Broad carpets of yellow coreopsis and purple chia dazzle the eye. While on the ridge, a watchful and quiet hiker might catch a glimpse of a wily coyote or a shy bighorn sheep on the Canyon Trail below.

## Canyon Trail

This 8.34 mile roundtrip route (9.76 miles from the parking lot) descends gradually from the higher, cooler Mojave Desert habitat down the canyon to the warmer Colorado Desert climate and then returns via the same route. This trail is a favorite of many local hikers and horseback riders. Much of the trail follows a willow-lined stream, and while staying on the canyon floor, hikers gaze at the steep-sided and sometimes towering canyon walls. This trail is subject to the desert heat and can be extremely strenuous on the return trip. Carry plenty of water and allow sufficient time for the return trip.

